



Grandparents, Godparents & Faith

Nurturing the Faith of our Children—Beyond the Church Building

At baptism, we promise to nurture the faith of the child. And even when we weren't there, others promised on our behalf so that no child would go unloved in the world and would always have a family in the body of Christ. At one time, teaching and modeling was easier to do. Today, the variety of family configurations, the decline in worship attendance, and social distancing has made us wonder how to be a parent, grandparent, godparent to the children that we love and care for. Whether you are a grandparent that is the primary faith teacher for your grandchildren, or you are a godparent or an "adopted" grandparent, here are some ways in which you can pass on the faith.

Live what you believe

You might be attending church on-line these days. Share with your family and friends when you find a service that is meaningful to you. Share! Don't tell them they should watch. Make it part of a conversation on the phone. Some churches are working on virtual Sunday School lessons, packets that they mail home or virtual check-ins. Ask how you can be on that list so that you can participate with the children you are nurturing.

Some families are having virtual dinners together. If you have one, begin with a dinner blessing using the one you taught your children years ago. Dinner discussions can be prompted by questions about who else to pray for in this pandemic. Make connections to faith when the opportunities arise. Ask your grandchildren what they would appreciate prayer for and then promise to do so.

Pray for your family and all children. The very act of praying suggests that you entrust your loved ones to God's care. Take it to heart that God is teaching all young hearts about love. Even when we wane in our efforts, the Holy Spirit never stops whispering in their ears. Faith is after all something we cannot give to anyone. Faith is a gift from God. The whole world is God's Sunday School.

Make an investment in the future of church communities so they continue for the children. Support your local church with your offerings even though you can't go. All congregations will need to find a way to offer their ministries in creative ways. We need to give them money, time, and patience.

Have faith that what you taught your son or daughter is in their hearts and minds. They cannot remove what you instilled. You have provided security for them in anxious times. So, for you to practice your faith as an example to your family makes sense. And parents will welcome help entertaining and engaging their penned-in family.

Believe what you live

What ideas from the Bible do you hold most dear? Like a Sunday School superintendent, become mindful of your curriculum. Make a literal list of all the ideas you hold dear and want to pass on to your godchildren and grandchildren. Then create opportunities for them to experience them.

If you believe in taking care of God's good creation, teach them how to garden, the names of plants and trees, what to recycle, about not polluting. Send the children on a scavenger hunt in their yard. Have them gather leaves

from trees and plants, different kinds of rocks, or seeds. Set-up a time to meet on Zoom or Facetime. Have them hold up what they found for you to identify. Or buy them a book on Amazon so they can tell you.

Maybe your favorite verses are about loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Teach children how to make cookies by sending them your favorite recipe to bake and encourage them to share the cookies with others. Or ask them to draw pictures for folks in nursing homes. You can provide the addresses to people you know who would welcome a sweet treat or simply a thoughtful card.

Ask children who they are worried about or what needs they might have heard on TV or through family conversations. Tell them you want to make a donation to help. Who would they suggest? Maybe they have classmates who could use a meal delivered to their home. One of our family stories is of my great grandfather putting bags of groceries anonymously on neighbors' back stoops during the Great Depression. It is a lesson that I have never forgotten.

Be the fun and caring grandparents that you already are

Our family is playing bingo online every night at 7:00 p.m. with all nine grandchildren and they only live three miles down the road. My wife ordered the game online and then delivered cards and tokens to their front doors. They could easily be mailed if your loved ones are farther away. Another grandfather in our neighborhood bought the Battleship game and delivered half the game to his grandson. Also, continue to mark holidays and birthdays as you always have. Call from time to time to see how they are coping. Your love is more important than you can imagine, especially now.

Don't preempt the role of parents

Certain subjects, such as grief when someone or a pet dies, are best handled by parents. And we are surrounded by death right now. Children grieve off and on over a long period of time and usually for years. Their questions come up suddenly when something happens to them or they are old enough to handle the aspect of death they are wondering about. Grandparents can be in the background by talking with mom or dad about what they might say before they talk. Not all books for children about grief are helpful. Read the book before you offer one and make sure you agree with the author.

Offer to buy Bibles for the children if they don't have one

If you get the greenlight to purchase Bibles for your grandchildren or godchildren, there are a few things you need to keep in mind. The Bible is primarily an adult book. Editors and writers do their best to make it useful to children. Some do a better job of this than others. Review the table of contents and see which stories they have chosen for their edition. Are they appropriate for the age of the reader? Preschoolers can wait until they are older to learn more stories.

Samson may sound exciting, but have you read it lately? There are stories though, like the drowning of baby boys in the Nile, that are difficult to skip over when telling the story of Moses. How parents and grandparents discuss it with the children is extremely important. We can agree that it was a terrible thing and wrong.

All good Sunday School teachers edit their curriculum and we must do the same when we read the Bible to our little ones. Here are some suggestions:

PRESCHOOLERS:

[The Early Readers Bible](#) by V. Gilbert Beers, ZonderKidz, 1991; Features appropriate pictures and questions for parents/grandparents to ask to enhance understanding and applications to life.

THIRD GRADERS:

[Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible](#) by Elizabeth Caldwell and Carol Wehrheim, eds., Westminster John Knox Press; Offers 150 stories that are organized by 13 themes, including Strong Women and Men, Listening for God, Parables, Healings, and Miracles.

Shine On: A Story Bible by Brethren Press; Includes beautiful illustrations, more stories and challenging ideas for the reader.

SIXTH GRADERS AND OLDER:

The Common English Bible, copyright by Common English Bible, 2011; The most recent translation of the bible using understandable words for our day.

Writing this Quicksheet made me examine my own grandparenting. What is it that I do to model my faith for all our little ones? I wondered, “Am I doing a good job? Is there something that I am not doing that would be helpful?” If you found one new idea in this reflection, I am pleased. If you checked off each one and said that you are doing that or something better, then take comfort in the fact that your worry is unfounded. Be at peace and God bless us, our children, our grandchildren, and all children everywhere.

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